

## IPSWICH FIRM'S PHILATELIC LINKS

By Mike J. Burrows

When Ipswich corn merchant A.K. Cowell set up his second son, Samuel Harrison Cowell, in business as, amongst other things, a printer, one wonders if he thought his son would be as successful as he turned out.

One of the first known imprints from this press is dated 1819, about a year after its inauguration. Besides being a printer, S.H. Cowell was also a tea, coffee and wine merchant. One of his price lists shows that he was selling strong Gun Powder Tea at 13/- a pound.

At the introduction of lithography or anastatic printing he saw to it that artists were encouraged in this form of expression. To help them he made up special kits for their use. When the Anastatic Drawing Society was formed they found a welcome sponsor in S.H. Cowell. This enabled them to have an annual volume of selected works by members published.

The coming of the railway into Suffolk put plenty of work on to the presses. Examples of the age are the collectors items, such as the Eastern Union Railway timetables.

At the Ipswich premises of the printers, the first production model of a machine capable of printing two colours at one pass was installed. This machine which ran at the then very high speed of 900 sheets per hour had been patented by a Mr Newsom in 1875.

In the same year W.S. Cowell had taken over command. Although it was many years before this was reflected in the company title. Electricity was first used to power the presses in 1887, the generator supplying enough power to enable other firms in the immediate vicinity to be supplied as well. This was some time before the Ipswich Corporation got around to providing companies with the same service.

When it became necessary, the Colne Valley and Halstead Railway Company approached Cowells to produce their railway letter fee stamps. These were made available in time for February 1891. The lithographed stamp was an adaption of the more general design used by other railway companies. Only one printing was made in sheets of twelve, four rows of three. Incidentally, Ewen in his catalogue gives the print as 1000. Whether this means stamps or sheets is not clear to me. Twelve thousand stamps seem rather a lot and yet 84 sheets does not seem enough.

The then well known firm of world-wide stamp dealers, Whitfield King & Company, went to Cowells, their local printers, to produce their famous "Universal Standard Catalogue of the Postage Stamps of the World" (What a mouthful, no wonder it got abbreviated to 'WK' catalogue.) The first edition of this 300 odd paged, well illustrated catalogue, rolled off the press in early 1899. If you look through old stamp magazines you will no doubt be surprised how important this tome once was to collectors. The reviews show that the 'WK' was more popular than today's famous range of catalogues.

By the 1930's the Printing Company had developed to include a paper bag factory, a large retail store and a wine and spirit merchants.

A large printing works was opened after the war in 1948 on a nearby site. This enabled the company to become more ambitious in the field of multicolour litho work.

There is no doubt that their professionalism and expertise cumulated in that fantastic volume, known locally as "The Book of the Century", more familiar to philatelists as "The Royal Philatelic Collection". Taking over five years to bring the experiments to fruition, the book became available in November 1952.

To give some idea of the work involved, Editor Clarence Winchester, with the then Keeper of the Royal Philatelic Collection Sir John Wilson, and the craftsmen of Cowells, were only satisfied with the reproduction of a certain pair of pages of stamps after 50 printings. These pages contained what was, at the time, the highest number of colours used for an illustration in the U.K.

In the book there are two collotype portraits. These were produced by Waterlow & Sons Limited, the one time postage stamp printers. These and the binding were the only parts of the production not carried out by Cowells.

Nowadays the Printers, the Furniture Store and the Wine Merchants still exist, albeit under different ownerships.

On a personal note, my own example of an anastatic press is a Waterlow & Sons production, and dates from about 1870. It was rescued from the stable block of an old established firm of solicitors located in Norfolk, about ten years ago.

One perfin is attributed to W.S. Cowell Limited,

675.1          WSC          13,10,8          4½mm,

This perfin is known from February 1901, the same year that the Company was incorporated as a private limited company known as W.S. Cowell Limited.

What is also of interest is the perfin,  
343.1          SHC          10,12,8          4½mm

This is known with postmarks of Ipswich dated between 1896 and 1898, and may have been the predecessor of the identified item.